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LESTER DEKOSTER, GEORGE STOB

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Synod and Biblical Infallibility

by Henry Stob

THE Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, which will convene in Grand Rapids on Wednesday, June 10, will be asked to make certain declarations on the Inspiration and Infallibility of the Scriptures, and to take certain implementing actions. The Agenda discloses that three Classes have submitted overtures respecting Biblical Inerrancy.

OVERTURES are not ordinarily sent to Synod without an occasion for doing so. The occasion in the present instance was provided by a student. The overtures are ecclesiastical responses to an article written by Junior Seminarian, Mr. Marvin Hoogland, and published in the September 1958 issue of *Stromata*, the Calvin Seminary Student Publication. The article, entitled "Infallibility Questioned," has in the last several months received generally critical treatment in the Church press. It has now moved three Classes to make formal representations to Synod.

Classis Sioux Center declares that in this article, and in a sympathetic notice of it which appeared in the Calvin College *Chimes*, "views have come to expression which have caused deep concern and seriously threaten the peace of the Church." Classis Rocky Mountain declares that the content of these articles "has occasioned serious concern by the Church" and adds that "such articles as these destroy the confidence of our supporting constituency." Classis Orange City declares that "the issue of inspiration and infallibility of Scripture has been brought before the whole denomination just recently in various articles that have appeared, causing some unrest in the church."

It is evident from these declarations that the occasion for the preparation and submission of the overtures was provided by the student authors who expressed themselves on the question of Inspiration and Infallibility in *Stromata* and *Chimes*. It is evident, too, particularly from the overtury of Classis Rocky Mountain, that the occasion was in part provided by the action of the school authorities in permitting the publication of the student articles.

TWO of the Classes who are overturing Synod are sure that the views expressed in the student articles are deserving of quick and unmistakable censure. Classis Orange City, apart from declaring that the student publications have caused "some unrest in the church," makes no theological judgment about them. Classis Sioux Center, however, judges that these articles "deny the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures," and thus deny a doctrine which

is "grounded in the self-attestation of Scripture and plainly taught in our Belgic Confession." Classis Rocky Mountain judges that the articles question "the historic position of the infallibility of Scripture" and thus touch upon "a vital and basic tenet of our faith." It judges that "the distribution of such views would tend to destroy the faith on which our Church has been founded," and it declares that "the appearance of such articles in print in school periodicals brand our faculties as liberal by other orthodox Churches."

ON the basis of these judgments the three Classes are asking Synod to take remedial and preservative action.

Classis Sioux Center is asking Synod to "declare that no seminary student who is not wholly committed to the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture shall have access to any pulpit in the Christian Reformed Church," and is urging Synod to "take such action as may seem necessary to assure the Church that even the least tampering with the truth of the infallible inspiration of God's Word by any person whomsoever in seminary or college will not be tolerated" (*Agenda* 1959, p. 349).

Classis Rocky Mountain is asking Synod "to re-affirm the historic position of the Reformed Churches in regard to the Infallibility of the Word of God as expressed in the writings of the Reformed Theologians, in the Creeds of the Church, and by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church," and "to exercise closer supervision of our school publications through our faculties, so that no utterances which are at variance with our historic position are printed" (*Agenda* 1959, p. 367). *

Classis Orange City is asking Synod "to declare that its interpretation of Scripture and the creeds concerning the inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture is clearly stated in the [first] five [of the six] conclusions of the Fourth Reformed Ecumenical Synod held in Potchefstroom, South Africa," and to declare "that all who sign the Formula of Subscription are bound by this interpretation" (*Agenda* 1959, pp. 372-373).

AS will have been observed, the overtures contain three distinct, though closely related, elements. They involve an interpretation of the student articles, particularly of the original article of Mr. Hoogland. They express a judgment about the teaching of Scripture, the Creeds, and Reformed

theologians concerning Biblical Infallibility. And they propose for adoption a course of action which will at once, without further inquiry, settle the question at issue.

I should like to comment on each of these three matters.

The Student Article

In order rightly to appraise the overtures which will come before Synod it is imperative to consider that to which they are a response — the student article in *Stromata*. A complete and formal digest of the writing is here perhaps out of place, but some account of the author's central assertions is certainly required. I consider that there are in the article at least four matters worthy of attention.

It should be observed, in the first place, that Mr. Hoogland does not call into question the Scriptural teaching about its own *Inspiration*. He accepts that teaching without reserve and on the basis of three very important considerations. He accepts it because (1) "the Bible itself claims to be inspired by the Holy Spirit"; because (2) "the doctrine of inspiration is essential to Christianity as a whole Hence the very foundations of Christianity would be weakened, if not destroyed, by the denial of the divine inspiration of Scripture"; and he accepts it because of (3) "the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that the Scriptures are inspired by God," wherefore "the fact that the Scriptures are indeed the Word of God becomes certain in the believer's heart" (*Stromata*, Sept. 1958, p. 8).

It is necessary to observe, in the second place, that Mr. Hoogland accepts the *Infallibility* of the inspired Scriptures in all that they teach or intend to teach. He recognizes and embraces the Bible as the authoritative Word of God to men and as the Church's infallible Rule for faith and practice. This deep evangelical faith forms the background of his entire article, and is also clearly and explicitly expressed in words. He says: "That the Bible is the uniquely inspired revelation of God to man; that it is objectively (not merely subjectively or psychologically) the Word of God; and that it is thus authoritative for life and doctrine are matters which must be accepted by faith. Given a true faith, these things become increasingly clear and meaningful to the believers as that faith deepens" (p. 8).

It is to be observed, in the third place, that Mr. Hoogland does admit the presence of *Errors* in the Bible. The following points should, however, be noted.

(1) Mr. Hoogland is careful to limit these "errors" or "mistakes" to matters of "grammatical structure," "historical details," "scientific conceptions which the Biblical writers held," and similar peripheral matters over which evangelical Bible students do not normally stumble.

(2) Mr. Hoogland is very careful to put all these matters under the divine superintendence of the Holy Spirit. These "mistakes" are not, in his judgment, fallible human elements which crept in, as it were, behind the Spirit's back, without His knowledge and consent. They invariably occur within the framework of the Holy Spirit's teaching purposes. That this is his view is clear from the following.

With reference to "scientific conceptions" Mr. Hoogland remarks that although Joshua's explanation of the lengthened day (that the sun and moon "stood still"), "arises out of a false view of the solar system . . . this does not disturb anyone in the least, and rightly so. One need only say that the Bible is not a textbook on science, that the purpose of the Bible was not to give man a view of astronomy, and that the Holy Spirit used men as they were in their social and cultural situations. In other words, we [Reformed students of the Bible] are prepared to admit that the Spirit did not necessarily correct the erroneous scientific conceptions which the Biblical writers held, that this was irrelevant for the purpose of these writings" (p. 9).

Mr. Hoogland makes the same point when considering "grammatical structure." He asks: "Does one dare suggest at this point that perhaps it was also irrelevant to the purpose of the Holy Spirit that He correct the proneness to grammatical mistakes which all writers share in varying degree?" (p. 9).

Expecting an affirmative answer to the question just put, he thereupon asks: "Why then should we become so upset when someone suggests that possibly certain narrations in Scripture are not historically accurate and are not meant to be?" The reference in this question is, of course, to matters of historical *detail*. To make plain that it is to this special kind of historical "inaccuracy" he is referring, Mr. Hoogland cites the discrepancy between Matthew 19:9 and Mark 10:11,12. He then remarks: "... one might say that it really makes no difference at all whether Christ spoke these words to the Pharisees, as Matthew relates, or to the disciples in the house, as Mark says. And that is true; it doesn't. Nor does this discrepancy, and others like it, need to upset the view that the Gospels were divinely inspired. It simply was not the purpose of the Holy Spirit to preserve the writers from these kinds of mistakes . . ." (pp. 9-10).

It is to be observed, in the fourth place, that it is against the background of such Biblical phenomena as have just been cited that Mr. Hoogland questions "*Infallibility*." Questioning neither the Bible's unique inspiration, nor its absolute authority for doctrine and life, he questions whether the Bible itself commits us to holding that it is infallible *in every respect, and from every conceivable point of view*. He questions "whether the word 'infallible,' with all its connotations [italics mine, HS], is really the right word to use in describing the Reformed view of the Scriptural revelation" (p. 9).

This, it will be noticed, is a very restricted question. It has nothing directly to do with the question of the Bible's infallibility in everything with which it is concerned. Mr. Hoogland knows and confesses that the Bible is infallible in doctrine. He is concerned only to examine the statement "that the Scriptures are infallible. . . in grammatical structure [and] in historical detail, as well as in doctrine" (p. 8).

He is questioning, not infallibility, but a certain *theory* of infallibility, a theory which makes the term "infallibility" carry a heavier load than it perhaps was meant to bear. He does not feel compelled to accept this theory for he finds that within it the term "infallibility" has been understood as requiring that the Biblical writers wrote perfect Hebrew and Greek, whereas in point of fact the style and syntax of the inspired authors is quite uneven in quality. Similarly, the term has been taken to imply that the numbers in the Bible are notarially or statistically exact, whereas most evangelical students of the Bible acknowledge that the inspired authors frequently use "round" or approximate numbers. He finds also that within the framework of this theory the term "infallibility" has been taken to mean that the Biblical writers observed the canons of scientific historiography, whereas it is generally recognized that the writers were not historians in the modern sense of that term.

Mr. Hoogland questions this theory of Infallibility not lightly or impiously, but on the basis of the Bible itself. The "phenomena" of the Bible, the very "character" of the Inspired Record, leads him to question the theory. But that is not all. There were three tests he employed to judge whether Inspiration was to be embraced by the Christian. He asked concerning this doctrine: Do the Scriptures clearly teach it? Is it essential to Christianity? Is it substantiated in the life of each individual Christian through the testimony of the Holy Spirit? He found that the doctrine of Inspiration met these tests, but he finds that the theory of Inerrancy here under scrutiny does

not fare so well. This particular theory, he finds, is neither dictated by Scripture, nor essential to Christianity, nor ratified by the Spirit.

Mr. Hoogland could be in error, but one thing is certain: here is not Unbelief speaking, but Faith in the inspired Scriptures.

The Creed and Reformed Theologians

I do not know whether the Classes Sioux Center, Rocky Mountain, and Orange City read Mr. Hoogland as I do, but it is evident that at least two of these Classes consider his views to be in conflict with the Creed. I regret to say that I do not find myself in agreement with them. I do not endorse everything Mr. Hoogland says, and am not sure that, even on his own basis, the term "error" is the most appropriate word to use in application to the discrepancies and inaccuracies which undeniably occur in Scripture. I do, nevertheless, find his competently written piece reflecting the spirit of Christian inquiry and moving quite within the boundaries of the Creed.

I am not, of course, contending that Mr. Hoogland's views are dictated by the Creed; the Creed does not demand these views anymore than it precludes them. Nor am I contending that they are demanded by that total truth to which the Creed gives limited expression and of which our Theology embraces but a part; this is a matter to which our Church should give renewed and increased attention so that our partial insights may be sharpened and enlarged. I am simply contending that Mr. Hoogland's views stand within the framework of the credal affirmations and on that account may be responsibly expressed and attended to in order that at last they may be confirmed, refined, or abandoned.

The Belgic Confession, which alone among the three Forms of Unity addresses itself directly to the question of the nature and authority of Scripture, clearly teaches in Article Seven that the Bible is the infallible rule of faith, but so does Mr. Hoogland. The Confession maintains in Article Four that nothing can be alleged against the canonical status of the Bible-books, but no negative allegation has come from the pen of Mr. Hoogland. In Article Five we confess that we believe without doubt all things contained in the books which we have received for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith. Mr. Hoogland has not called into question a single point of faith, nor does his theory manifestly require him to do so.

It would seem that the particular question to which Mr. Hoogland addresses himself is not contemplated in the creeds. There are many such questions that the Creed does not contemplate. Because the Creed is a confession of faith and not

a theological treatise, it leaves many things to be defined and distinguished within the area of theological reflection. It makes no distinction, for example, between the Bible we possess and the Autographa to which its more absolute assertions are often referred. It makes no distinction between, and therefore does not commit one to, a mechanical or an organic theory of inspiration. Nor does it distinguish between the several kinds of Biblical authority, as, for example, between the well-known *auctoritas historiae* and *auctoritas normae*. It does not, in short, preempt the field of theology. Because it does not do so it leaves room for a restricted number of important questions, among which, I believe, must be counted the one asked by Mr. Hoogland. Since this is so I could not wish to have his question summarily silenced.

Of course, once such a question is raised by a confessional theologian it must be answered in accordance with and in the spirit of the accepted Creed, which in this instance means upon the basis of a reverent study of the Scriptures embraced as the uniquely and plenarily inspired Word of God which is absolutely authoritative for faith and life. Any solution founded on another basis or tending to supplant this one would obviously have to be rejected by the evangelical Christian. To provide a sound solution is the challenge that now faces the Church.

It will, not doubt, be said that we already have the solution. It will be said that Reformed and evangelical scholars long ago addressed themselves to the question raised by Mr. Hoogland, and long ago arrived at a consensus. It will be said that these theologians are virtually unanimous in rejecting the possibility of any kind of error in a divinely inspired Book. This cannot be wholly denied. A formidable array of pious, staunch, and learned Christians can be marshalled in support of these assertions. Yet the testimony is not all on one side. It is generally recognized that Calvin's exegetical practices, if not his theological formulas, are not in the pattern formed by the overtures now before Synod. A demonstration of this will be provided in next month's *Journal*. But besides Calvin there are others, a few of whom from more recent times I shall take the liberty to quote.

James Orr, the great Reformed theologian and redoubtable opponent of the higher critics, said: "It is urged . . . that unless we can demonstrate what is called the 'inerrancy' of the Biblical record, down even to its minutest details, the whole edifice of belief in revealed religion falls to the ground. This, on the face of it, is a most suicidal position for any defender of revelation to take up. . . . Does the Bible itself claim, or inspiration necessitate, such an 'errorless' record, in matters of minor

detail? . . . Very commonly it is argued by upholders of this doctrine that 'inerrancy' in every minute particular is involved in the very idea of a book given by inspiration of God. This might be held to be true on a theory of verbal dictation, but it can scarcely be maintained on a just view of the actual historical genesis of the Bible. One may plead, indeed, for a 'supernatural providential guidance' which has for its aim to exclude all, even the least, error or discrepancy in statement, even such as may inhere in the sources from which the information is obtained, or may arise from corruption of anterior documents. But this is a violent assumption which there is nothing in the Bible really to support. It is perilous, therefore, to seek to pin down faith to it as a matter of vital moment" (*Revelation and Inspiration*, pp. 198, 214).

Francis L. Patton, the Princeton theologian, said: "It is a hazardous thing to say that being inspired the Bible must be free from error; for then the discovery of a single error would destroy its inspiration. Nor have we any right to substitute the word 'inerrancy' for 'inspiration' in our discussion of the Bible unless we are prepared to show from the teaching of the Bible that inspiration means inerrancy — and that, I think, would be a difficult thing to do" (*Fundamental Christianity*, p. 163).

Clarence E. Macartney, the well-known Presbyterian minister and the intimate friend and associate of Dr. Machen in the struggle against Modernism, said: "By the inerrancy of the Scriptures is not meant that there can be no discrepancy between the numerals in Kings and Chronicles, or that (although the subject is still discussed by scholars) in the passage where reference is made in Matthew's gospel to what was done with the thirty pieces of silver, the supposed prophecy could not have been referred to Jeremiah instead of Zachariah where it seems properly to belong. That is not what we mean when we speak of the inerrancy of the Scriptures" (*The Presbyterian*, Dec. 20, 1923, p. 7).

Everett F. Harrison, Professor of New Testament in Fuller Theological Seminary, and contributor to the recently published symposium on Revelation and the Bible edited by Dr. Carl Henry, said: "One must grant that the Bible itself, in advancing its own claim of inspiration, says nothing about its inerrancy . . . Does inspiration require that a Biblical writer should be preserved from error in the use of sources? Presumably when Stephen asserted that Abraham left Haran for Canaan after his father's death (Acts 7:4), he was following a type of Septuagintal text such as Philo used . . . The Hebrew text of Genesis will not permit this . . . if the inductive study

of the Bible reveals enough examples of this sort of thing to make the conclusion probable, then we shall have to hold the doctrine of inspiration in this light. We may have our own ideas as to how God should have inspired the Word, but it is more profitable to learn, if we can, how he has actually inspired it" (*Revelation and the Bible*, pp. 239, 249).

August Lecerf, formerly Professor in the Protestant Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris, whom J. I. Packer, in his recent book, "*Fundamentalism*" and the Word of God, most aptly characterized as a spokesman for classical Reformed theology, said: ". . . it will be understood that a narrative by a writer, who has been moved by inspiration to record his memories faithfully, as they become present to his mind at the moment of writing, may show divergences of detail, 'diversities' as Calvin calls them, from a narrative by another writer who sets out to collect testimonies accessible to his researches from sure witnesses, but whose memory may have retained details which have escaped the other writer and who presents them in a different chronological order. Such 'diversities' are willed by God says Calvin. The essential thing is that the writers should agree on the main point which is the sole real object of their records" (*An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 311).

Herman Ridderbos, the well-known and greatly respected Professor of New Testament at Kampen, said: "What about verbal inspiration? I am under no delusion that I can speak the final word in this matter. If anywhere, here we should be eager to learn the Spirit's own concept about His work and to beware of prescribing our concepts to the Spirit of God. . . . What about the authority of Holy Scripture? . . . The books of the New Testament are the word of God to His Church by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. . . . The Spirit has inspired . . . the apostles . . . in order to be the foundation of the Church. . . . This is the infallibility of the word of the Scriptures as the word of God. We can rely on their witness as a kerygma to the faith in the *magnalia Dei* in Jesus Christ. It is possible that some people require more. They would . . . tell precisely how many blind men there were at Jericho when Jesus passed, one or two. . . . It is a fact, however, that the witness of the apostles and the witness of the Spirit do not have such a nature" (*When the Time Had Fully Come*, pp. 93-94).

These representative spokesmen for the Reformed and evangelical faith are cited not in order to conduct an argument from authority, nor in order to suggest there are no Reformed spokesmen who hold a contrary opinion, but only and precisely to indicate that the question here being considered is one that brethren of the same house-

hold may and should discuss freely and openly, without mutual recriminations, and without premature foreclosures.

The Action Proposed

For the reasons already indicated it is to be desired that Synod decline to adopt the proposals for action contained in the overtures now before it. Let the matter be aired at Synod if need be, but let us already now remind ourselves that it is a matter which is ill-suited to parliamentary debate, and not suited at all to a quick and peremptory decision. It is a matter that requires hard, long, and prayerful study in an atmosphere of mutual confidence. Let, therefore, a Committee be appointed to take the whole question under scrutiny, to consider also the Report of the Ecumenical Synod, and to confer with Reformed theologians in this country and in The Netherlands. Meanwhile let those with opportunity to do so address themselves with vigor to the problem and let those among us who are best equipped to enlighten and instruct do so in pamphlets, books, and articles.

This, it would seem, is the way to proceed, for it is true what Frank E. Gaebelein said in the recently published symposium on Revelation and the Bible: ". . . there is another way of dealing with Biblical veracity as it is involved with the Christological integration of Scripture. And that is nothing less than a rethinking of the whole concept of inerrancy and verbal inspiration. . . . the perfect solution of the tension between Christ's own view of the Bible and the difficulties inherent in certain portions of the written Word is still beyond our grasp. This is not to say, however, that progress toward solution cannot be made. Instead, one of the great needs of the day is for scholars to re-examine in the light of all the data the concept of inerrancy as applied to Scripture. Moreover, such re-examination cannot be done hastily. If there is valid ground for criticism of the prevalent attitude of much contemporary theology toward a high view of inspiration, it is that the question has been disposed of prematurely. But the same criticism must be made of conservative theology when it insists upon what may be a rigid formulation of a position that, though accepted on faith, yet needs clarification and redefinition" (*Revelation and the Bible*, pp. 397-398).

And as for Synod's attitude toward the author of the article in *Stromata*, and towards those of the students who may be found to sympathize with him, this should be determined in the light of the following remark of August Lecerf: "Every hypothesis which does not deny *a priori* the inspiration of the original text, which does not systematically exclude miracle and prophecy, and presuppose the humanist ideology of the 18th or 19th

centuries; in other words, which does not imply that Scripture is incapable of fulfilling the principal function assigned to it by its divine Author, every such hypothesis has a right to the impartial and attentive examination of the Reformed exegete. Scripture was not given to the Church in order to provide an assurance that such a person was

present on a certain occasion and not another, or that a miracle took place at one end of a village and not another. It was given to be rule of faith and life, tell us what we ought to believe concerning God, His will and purpose in regard to His people and the world" (*An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 313-314).

Calvin on Secession

by Leonard Verduin

THE REFORMED JOURNAL circulates principally, we presume, among people of secession stock. Some have secession in their blood because of a secession experience their fathers had in Europe. Others are the sons of men who had to do with secession in this country. Still others have gone through a secession experience in their own generation. And there are some who have in their heritage two of these secession experiences; even some who have all three! Some are secessionists; some, secessionists squared; some, secessionists cubed. This would imply that all of us are concerned to know what John Calvin thought of secession; for we are one in esteeming highly the ideas of the great Genevan.

All of us are also confronted with ecumenism, if not with Church-unionism. And that fact makes us even more interested in the question what it was that Calvin had to say about secession. For the right-to-secede is closely bound up to the duty-to-unite. We trust therefore that the readers of this *Journal* will be interested in a few notes on Calvin and Secession.

Before we proceed with this we must utter a word of caution, however. It is this, that we must not cite Calvin as though he were a contemporary. Calvin lived in a world vastly different from the one in which we live, with vastly different problems and vastly different axioms. Calvin lived and labored in a world in which denominations-existing-next-to-each-other was unknown; he lived in a world where there was only the "true" church and the "false." And Calvin seems to have acted upon the supposition that even this situation was but an interim situation. He fondly expected Protestantism to overcome its inner tensions. And he hoped expectantly that "Rome" would yet see the error of its way and return to the Truth. It follows that what a man in such a world may have said about secession must not be transcribed glibly into the present. What Calvin would have said in our world

is a matter of conjecture; all we know is what he said in his world.

Calvin did encounter secessionism. And we shall see in this paper what he had to say to it when he encountered it.

In fact, Calvin in a way made his debut in the world of his times with a Tract written to correct this secessionism. This Tract, written in June of 1544, was at once, in the very next year, published in both Dutch and English translations. This seems to indicate that it was in this Tract that the common people first came to grips with the mind of him to whom they were destined to listen very often afterwards.

The Tract of which we speak is the *Brieve Instruction Contre les Anabaptistes* (printed in the original French in *Corpus Reformatorum*, Vol. 35, pp. 44-142). This Tract was written in an attempt to confute the Anabaptist articles of Schlatten am Rande, seven in number. Calvin follows them one by one and adds a confutation of two other matters attributed to the Anabaptists. The first of the seven articles dealt with the question whether the thing signified in baptism was such as to warrant infant baptism; the second took up the matter of the need for introducing into the Church of Christ a system of excommunication set up along New Testament lines. It was in connection with this second article that Calvin said some things about secession that we shall enlarge upon presently.

OF excommunication and the need of introducing it in a Church worthy of the name the Anabaptist manifesto declared: "Excommunication ought to be practiced touching all who have professed Christ, have been baptized, but who nevertheless through weakness and not of deliberate purpose fall into some fault. These ought to be exhorted and warned twice in private; at the third admonition they are to be publicly expelled in the presence of the entire congregation, in order that

it may with one zeal break the bread and drink the cup."

Before we transcribe Calvin's confutation of this article we must remind the reader that the institution for the restoration of which the Anabaptists agitated was as yet unknown in the circles of the Reformation churches. As is well known, the third of the so-called "three notes" whereby the true Church may be known entered the stream of Calvinism later (and when it was finally added to the other two "notes" there were those who resisted still, saying that "that is what we formerly scolded the Anabaptists for"); Calvin himself preferred to speak of but two "notes," the first two, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacrament.

In his confutation of this article Calvin, with his usual precision, wrote: "Here is the nub of the matter. They hold that wherever the institution [of excommunication] is not in use or is not duly exercised there the Church is not; and they say that it is unlawful for a Christian to receive the Supper there. For this reason they separate themselves . . . hiding behind the argument that they do not wish to be party to the pollution that takes place when they are not barred who deserve to be." Calvin thereupon, after pointing out that the Church of Corinth was still a Church even though it did not exclude the incestuous man, reminds his opponents that "we must not expect a perfect Church in this world, seeing that our Lord states plainly that it will be like a threshing floor in which the good grain is mixed with the bad, or, like a fishnet in which diverse kinds of fish are brought together. Let us take this as ending the matter, that we must to the end put up with many evil herbs for fear of pulling out the good with the bad.¹ What more do you want? Our Lord has wished to subject his Church to this poverty that all along the good are mixed with the bad . . . Wherever we see the Word truly preached and the Sacraments administered there the Church is in evidence, in spite of the vices and faults which may be in the day by day lives of the people (*nonobstant les vices et les macules qui pourront estre en la vie commune des hommes*)."

In connection with the Anabaptist stricture that he who attends a promiscuous administration of the Sacrament is polluted thereby, Calvin wrote: "Nevertheless, if this occurs it is not for all that

1. The use made here by Calvin of certain New Testament parables (the one of the Fishnet, of the Field Planted with Diverse Seeds, etc.) dates back to Augustine, the first and the greatest of the apologetes for the idea of an every-body-embracing Church. The Reformers, one and all, appropriated this medieval exegesis of these passages uncritically. In spite of the fact that Jesus Himself said that "the field is the world" men kept on talking as though He had said that the scene of the mixture was the *Church*.

right for men to withdraw from the fellowship and to deprive themselves of the Supper."²

Against the Anabaptist assertion regarding St. Paul's words about not eating or drinking with men of scandalous conduct (I Cor. 5:11) Calvin urges that "this has to do with private association and not with public communion . . . If the Church tolerates an unworthy person then they who know him to be such do well to shun his private company . . . just so that it does not occasion schism or separation in the Church in regard to the public communion (*moyennant qu'il ne face point de schisme ny separation en l'Eglise quant a la communion publique*)"

As a parting shot Calvin informs his opponents that God has always confounded the enterprise of those who separate themselves seeing that "there is no forgiveness of sins nor any salvation elsewhere; even though we should have the appearance of sanctity more than angelic if by our presumption we come to separate from the Christian compagnie we have become worse than devils."³

Such then was Calvin's view of the propriety of secession.

AS we have intimated at the outset, we must not transcribe what Calvin wrote right into our own times — for the problem has changed. Nor may it be forgotten that the Anabaptists also argued from the point of view of "the true Church"; their secession did not mean simply the creation of another denomination. Like Calvin, they, too, would have insisted that there is no salvation outside the Church to which they belonged. Men simply had not yet been confronted with the spectacle of "denominations." For that reason we cannot simply transfer the argument of the sixteenth century into the twentieth.

What has happened in the meantime is the downgrading of the concept of the Church as an object not of faith but of sight. We no longer talk of "the true Church" but rather of churches of varying degrees of purity. For that reason we have come to take secession rather lightly, it seems. Certainly when in the "Kolonie" men talked of the right of "quitting our company again" if and when they

2. Because the Anabaptists, who had repudiated the medieval concept of the Church, provided for the expulsion of men who were not Christian they were accused (also by Calvin) of being perfectionists, people who expected a Church "without spot or wrinkle." This was not quite fair to the Anabaptists, for they were not agitating for a Church consisting of *perfect* people but for a Church composed of *confessing* people and not simply of the rank and file.

3. The reader will notice how that Calvin here, perhaps unwittingly, bears testimony to the unusually excellent conduct patterns of the Anabaptists. Their idea of a Church-of-believers-and-of-believers-only was bearing fruit; to this contemporary witness bears eloquent testimony.

were of the opinion that they would be better off "by themselves again" they were giving evidence of having travelled a long way since Geneva. And they who some years later made use of this "out" gave evidence of having come just as far.

Secession may perhaps be justifiable in the modern scene — but only at the cost of a radical down-grading of the concept of the Church.

What we certainly can *not* do is to talk rather flippantly about the right to secede (against the background of the down-grading of our concept of the Church) and then with the secession completed revert back to the high view of the Church of former times. People who pass glibly over secession are obliged to talk softly about "the true Church."

A Letter From the Congo

There remains a persistent feeling among many in the West that African "natives" can continue to be managed and controlled today as they could be twenty-five years ago. These proponents of the old colonial viewpoint have learned little from events in Asia and nothing from the current rise of nationalism in Africa. What is even more lamentable is the persistence of this feeling among many members of the Western churches with respect to the rights and responsibilities and privileges of younger churches in missionary areas.

Below is printed a letter which should stir all readers to a reexamination of present missionary policies. Personally I feel that no mission and no missionary are so far advanced in the matter of recognizing the new day as not to find in this letter a salutary impulse to continued reflection on and action in the new course needed in our time.

The letter was written by church leaders in the Belgian Congo representing a society of African Christians known as the Association of Friends of Protestant Missions (AMIPRO, from the French name of the Society) and was directed to the Congo Protestant Council, a predominantly missionary organization. It was released by the Africa Committee of the International Missionary Council.

—HARRY R. BOER

Leopoldville, Belgian Congo
February 17, 1959

Congo Protestant Council,
1959 Meeting, Lake Munkamba.
Mr. President:

The directing committee of the Association of Friends of the Protestant Missions (AMIPRO) has the honour of addressing the present letter to the 1959 session of the CPC, believing that the President and all the delegates of the different missions will examine the points raised in the letter with their usual good will.

First of all, AMIPRO thanks the CPC, in which

it sees the image of all the missions, for the immense work accomplished by the ministers, white and black, in Congo.

It takes the liberty of raising the following points with the CPC, expressing its thanks in anticipation for the very special attention which will be given to this document.

1. THE AIM OF PROTESTANT MISSIONS IN CONGO

AMIPRO observes that the missions, all the missions, seem to forget the aims for which they came to Congo. The proof of this is that up to the present there is, to our knowledge, no mission which has formed a purely indigenous church. We know there are individual churches in certain localities. These we regard as purely a matter of internal organization of the church and not a true church having its own constitution and corporate status.

Another forgotten fact is this: no mission seems to realize that missions come to an end, but the church remains.

AMIPRO, however, considers it a duty to remind the CPC of the aims of Protestant missions. These aims are clearly defined in the Bible — "Go, and make disciples of all nations"

It is high time for all missions to consider the formation of the (one) Church of Christ in Congo, even from this present year; the present missions remaining as local elements of the church.

2. REFORMATION OF THE CHURCH

The general policy of the Protestant missions has been that of the Belgian government in Congo: *paternalism*. Now Belgium is changing its policy, having defined the stages toward the independence of Congo. AMIPRO asks the missions to do as much.

We know that neither the Belgian Parliament nor King Baudoin I has waited for the establishment of a number of universities before applying the new policy. AMIPRO insists that the reformation of the church be undertaken with the ministers now in service and those about to leave

school. We want to see, in the very near future, African ministers in posts of authority hitherto reserved to their white colleagues.

3. TRAINING LEADERS.

The previous question of reforming the church raises the problem of Congo leadership. The lack of leaders springs from lack of foresight, if not from bad faith among their trainers, rather than from their own fault.

The ability of the ministers trained thus far is questioned, rightly or wrongly, by the missionaries themselves. Consequently their status is often below their ability. This leads to the supposition that missionaries have purposely avoided training Congolese with ability to administer their own churches so that they may continue to direct this work. Hence, most Protestant Africans do not see that the church is any of their business.

What is keeping you from giving us ministers of your own quality?

AMIPRO asks for notable improvement of the programmes of the existing schools for the training of the ministry. If this cannot be done in Congo, ministerial students should be sent abroad to complete their studies. In this connection we note the initiative taken by certain missions (e.g., the Salvation Army and the Methodist Mission) which have sent Congolese overseas for this purpose.

The delay in training ministers is unjustified, considering that Protestants entered Congo before the Catholics, and that the latter already have priests and bishops who enjoy the same full powers as their white colleagues. Is it logical for the Protestants to keep on suffering an inferiority complex in relation to the Catholics in this country?

4. EDUCATION

Education goes along with evangelization. In education, too, the Protestant missions have accomplished little despite many efforts. We are not unaware of the difficulties met by many of them who have to teach in a language not their own.

The time has come when it is utterly necessary to overcome this obstacle. We propose to our missionaries that they have French-speaking personnel. This will solve the crucial problem of having a well-instructed Protestant *elite*.

The concurrence of our missionaries will enable us to engage in discussions with the competent authorities to assure this. We want to collaborate with you, for we feel the necessity of this.

5. HUMAN RELATIONS

There is no need to go into detail to demonstrate the importance and the necessity of good human relations in the church. After three-quarters of a century these relations are still not good. Yet, as the Minister for Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi

declared recently, they are "the essential condition of success" in the work of evangelism in Congo.

We urge our white pastors to eliminate all racial discrimination in the church of our Saviour. Let the African minister cease to be a child (in their eyes). Recognize the human dignity of every person working under your orders. If Africans deplore bad relations in civil life, how much more so in the church.

The moment has come for the missions to stop fruitless discussions and begin to examine their consciences. Let them take thought immediately for the formation of the Church of Christ in Congo wherein black and white shall work together.

"The hand extended too late may be refused."

Will you please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of our high regard and fraternal spirit.

For AMIPRO,

[signed] S. Tshisuaka, President
 S. Kayemge, General Secretary
 N. Ilunga, S. J. Kamba,
 S. Kayembe, N. Kabeya,
 Ekofo Albert, M. Kavulu,
 M. Bokondo, J. Mbilo.

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Our Brethren in Nigeria

GENEVA TO GINDIRI (IV)

by Lester DeKoster

Geneva, January 5, 1556

To all honest ministers of Christ, and sincere worshippers of God, who observe and follow the pure doctrine of the gospel in the churches of Saxony and Lower Germany, John Calvin, with brotherly affection, wishes increase of grace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

... In regard to the one God and his true and legitimate worship, the corruption of human nature, free salvation, the mode of obtaining justification, the office and power of Christ, repentance and its exercises, faith which, relying on the promises of the gospel, gives us assurance of salvation, prayer to God, and other leading articles, the same doctrine is preached by us both. We call on one God the Father, trusting to the same Mediator; the same Spirit of adoption is the earnest of our future inheritance... Christ has reconciled us all by the same sacrifice. In that righteousness which he has purchased for us, our minds are at peace, and we glory in the same head. It is strange if Christ, whom we preach as our peace, and who, removing the ground of disagreement, appeased to us our Father in heaven, do not also cause us mutually to cultivate brotherly peace on earth. What shall I say of our having to fight daily under the same banner against Antichrist and his tyranny, against the foul corruptions of the Christian religion, against impious superstitions, and the profanation of all that is sacred. To disregard these many pledges of sacred unity, and this concert which has visibly been sanctioned by heaven, and plot disunion among those who are fighting in the same service, is a not less cruel than impious laceration of the members of Christ. This it were most unjust in you to favor or countenance in any way.

"Farewell, respected brethren. May the Lord defend you and govern you by his Spirit, and bless you more and more." (Tracts, II, 248, 251)

So far, John Calvin.

How apposite are his words to our own times and problems.

How vividly do these sentences from the heart of our celebrated forebear express the sentiments which must have animated the hearts of those Nigerian Christians who assembled at Gindiri last February to dedicate the Theological College of Northern Nigeria.

Change the heading of the letter from Geneva to: Gindiri, February 14, 1959. Change the writer from

John Calvin to: the Missionaries, Pastors, Evangelists, and members of the Christian Church in Northern Nigeria. Change the addressee to: the Christian Reformed Church. Do not, then, these words from the hand of one long dead yet burn with the passionate plea which the Nigerian Christian would surely wish to address to us, his brethren across the sea?

And how shall we, who so gladly bear the name of him whose pen wrote those lines, refuse to heed them now as they are echoed from our Nigerian brethren (and Calvin's Nigerian brethren) in Jesus Christ?

THIS letter from which I have quoted arose out of a controversy — one to which Calvin gave the best his failing health allowed him to expend.

Happily for us all, there was much in the matter and in the manner of that controversy which is with us no more. But one aspect of it, the question of doctrinal distinctiveness and loyalty to truth, remains with us still.

This, briefly, is the story: Calvin had spent well-nigh his life blood to secure unity between the Lutheran and Zwinglian churches concerning the nature of the Lord's Supper. Almost from the beginning these two Reformation groups had differed over the meaning of "This is my body." It was a key issue, because the same question lay at the heart of the Reformers' charge that the Roman Church made an "idolatry of the Mass."

So the dispute between Zwinglians and Lutherans waxed warm and long. Calvin is obliged to confess that neither side had excelled in charity. But into the breach between them he stepped, to be buffeted from both quarters. At length, however, after some years of prayer and entreaty — "we humbly beg to be heard," as he said — by letter and by travel in person, he won the acceptance of Zwinglian Zurich to, and the apparent concurrence of Melanchthon in, a form of agreement known as the *Consensus Tigurinus*. Harmony-in-difference appeared to be just around the corner.

But around the corner was, instead, a Lutheran pastor, by name Joachim Westphal.

Westphal objected to the *Consensus* in a vigorous pamphlet. He charged that the agreement which Calvin had forged was a "dissembled concord." He argued that "peace purchased at the expense of truth is cursed," and charged Calvin with pursuing such peace. Though in fact, Calvin notes sadly,

Westphal really objected "not so much to the doctrine comprehended in our formula of Agreement as to agreement itself."

Calvin rose in defence of his hard-won *Consensus*. Not by dissembling but by plain speaking, he said, was unity achieved. To Westphal's assertion that "no alleged absurdities can induce him to depart from the words of Christ and Paul, and the firm consent of the Church," Calvin replies tartly: "As if this were not the trite and common excuse for all errors."

Aware as he was that not all differences were settled by the *Consensus*, Calvin appeals to the Lutherans on the ground of the massive array of doctrines which they, and he, and the Zwinglians held in common. From this impassioned plea come the paragraphs which I have quoted at the opening of this article.

And who will make a more moving appeal for basic unity though differences remain than was Calvin's?

And who will face the issue more squarely than did he: Shall we, Calvin demands, "force into unwilling conflict those who not only agree among themselves, but speak the same thing?" Speak, that is, the "same thing" which he so carefully enunciates in his letter, the "sum of the Christian faith" he sketches in a few sentences.

This was the question, then, as Calvin himself phrased it; and is not this the question now confronting us in Nigeria?

Is it said, then, only to the Lutherans in 1556, or also to us in 1959: "Shall we force into unwilling conflict" those Nigerian Christians who, by common testimony of all who know them, "agree among themselves" and "speak the same thing"? Speak, indeed, the confession which we ourselves have endorsed.

Calvin spent himself to the very end to make the answer to his question a resounding No! Westphal made the answer, on the grounds of "loyalty to the truth," a Yes. Which of these men saw wider, deeper, and higher? Who was really the more loyal to the truth? History has answered this question: our spiritual father is John Calvin, and we remember one Joachin Westphal only because he happened to differ with the "genius of Geneva," a difference which Calvin repeatedly offered to heal.

BUT there yet remain some arguments for taking Westphal's answer in Nigeria. To these we turn briefly now.

(1) A concern for the "pure conception of the truth" preserved in Calvinism obliges us, it is said, to insist upon our own school in Nigeria.

Does our "Calvinism," then, teach us a deeper concern for the Truth than Calvin himself practiced?

Or do we forget, as Calvin did not, that *one fundamental aspect* of the Truth is the *unity* of true

believers? How do we witness to a "pure conception of the truth" (including that aspect of the Truth witnessed to by Christ, Paul, and Calvin without exception: that all believers are *One Body*) if we refuse at the outset, and without prayerful attempt to do otherwise, to participate with other Nigerian Christians in an educational enterprise which these Christians earnestly desire and pray for? If the Truth is, as we confess, *One* — how do we witness to a "pure conception" of the truth by withdrawing from association with those who, by our Synod's own declaration, witness with us to the creeds which embody that Truth?

(2). We display to the Africans, it is said, no concern for doctrinal distinctiveness when we join other denominations in union effort.

Was our Calvin, then, obtuse to the distinctions still remaining among Lutherans, Zwinglians, and himself — and quite evident, he knew, to their Roman adversaries—even as he forged the *Consensus*?

Is it not more likely that the Nigerian Christians wait patiently to see if we, like Calvin and themselves, can transcend denominational differences in a common enterprise just because all participants together hold those Christian truths enunciated by Calvin to the Lutherans in 1556?

(3) We commit ourselves, it is maintained, to corporate responsibility for the proclamation of error by our Lutheran and Baptist brethren if we participate in TCNN.

True it is that we believe our conceptions the most Biblical of all. Did we not, we would choose to serve our Lord in another denominational setting. But He would be *the same Lord*, as Calvin reminds the Lutheran pastors. And being One Lord, He as the Head unites all true believers in *One Body*, despite denominational distinctions. And if we are *One Body*, we must accord to Lutherans and to Baptists the same right to think us in error about specific matters that we exercise in thinking them wrong. For, says Calvin, "Westphal ever keeps crying that all are heretics who, in attempting to explain the words of Christ, differ from each other. He cannot get off without giving his own exposition, and yet he differs from us. What then follows, but just that he must be classed among the heretics?" That is, if Christian difference witnesses to heresy, and not only to human finitude, then all who differ, says Calvin, declare themselves heretic, as Cardinal Sadeleto had long ago maintained. But not so for Calvin. So long, he said, as we are "directed to one Christ," we need not "strive too keenly to prevent" each communion from having its "own Catechism" or "confession." In full cognizance, then, of our finitude, we join in united witness at Gindiri "to one Christ." It is to *this witness* that Lutherans and Baptists — they no less loyal to the Truth than we — and Calvinists contribute men, money, and prayers to TCNN, awaiting in faith that final

day when, knowing then even as we are also known, we shall no longer need any *Consensus* to correct our finite visions of our common faith. Furthermore, it is thus that the Spirit has led the Nigerian Church. It is not we who impose false unity upon them. It is they who implore us not to sever the ties which, they firmly believe, God has cemented. We may be able to shatter the visible Oneness which Nigerian Christians cherish; but we cannot re-make Nigerian church history; nor have we tried to do so before now, and this with great blessing upon our *union labors* there.

(4) Our professor, it has been argued, would violate his ordination vows by participation in union educational enterprise.

To this argument the TCNN Committee *Report* to Synod of 1959, by the Minority which opposes participation in the School, gives adequate answer. For they recommend that Synod agree to keeping Dr. Boer in TCNN, if this be the wish of the College. Synod surely is not here being advised, by those who oppose TCNN, to encourage or even permit a Christian Reformed minister to violate his vows of ordination.

(5) Finally, it is argued that, while we might support TCNN with men, and with money, and with prayers, we should not officially participate in the College, because this involves joint responsibility for the school.

We have, in fact, participated already in the creation of TCNN. We are, in fact, intimately associated with its progress and leadership. No stigma is attached to this joint witness to Christ in the classroom in dark Africa. Undoubtedly many grateful hearts have poured our thanks to God for our

participation in this Christian College.

Moreover, if by official action — and this has come about in no other way, nor can it — we loan men, give or permit solicitation of funds, and encourage by our prayers this Theological College: if we do all this, by what evasion might we suppose that we can escape responsibility for our deeds simply by omitting to vote *official participation* in the school? This would be attempted compromise indeed, not at Gindiri but at home. The choice between the answer of Calvin and the answer of Westphal is at least not equivocal. The one said, clearly, *Yes* to unity; the other said, equally clearly, *No*.

And we may rejoice, may we not, that we *can*, in fact — and do now in TCNN — participate with other *Christians*, even though with them we have some differences, in performing God's work in Nigeria! For, remember, it was to Westphal's church, too, that Calvin addressed the letter from which I quoted. And it was Westphal who refused to find unity-through-difference, and rejected the right hand which Calvin extended. Even at the end, when all the hard words had been spoken, Calvin's *Last Admonition to Joachim Westphal* was this: "Nay, if he can now put on the mind of a brother, I in my turn am prepared to embrace him as a brother."

Is not this *putting on the mind of a brother* the answer to "compromise," to "bitterness," to "confusion," to "disloyalty," and to whatever phantoms we may now envision along the road to Gindiri? For, is it not so: we are, indeed, abroad and at home, *brethren* in Jesus Christ, our Lord!

Calvin's Liturgical Legacy

by Elco H. Oostendorp

IN this anniversary year of Calvin's birth and of his *Institutes* it may be profitable to be reminded of the debt we in the Christian Reformed Church owe him as the father of our liturgy. Naturally, in this he did not work alone, but his dynamic leadership blazed new trails in setting up a Biblical pattern of worship. We are so accustomed to this pattern that it is only with an effort that we can imagine how great a task it was to break away from Roman Catholic ritualism and superstition and guide the entire church to worship in spirit and truth.

The primary emphasis of Calvin was on the centrality of the preaching of the Word in the worship service. The open Bible, not the altar or font, must

be the focus of attention for the congregation. Reading Calvin's sermons shows how deeply he felt that the minister speaks as the representative of Christ. Listening to the Word is also an act of worship. Above all Calvin insisted on intelligent, enlightened church members whose response to God was not one of mere form and ritual nor of mystical sentiment.

FOREMOST among the liturgical practices we owe to Calvin is the singing of the Psalms. It is true that in recent years both the Christian Reformed Church and De Gereformeerde Kerken have departed from exclusive use of the Psalms and are introducing more hymns. To Calvin, however, we

owe the distinctively Reformed appreciation of the Psalter as the Church's inspired praise book. In the metrical versions used in various countries Calvinistic Christians have found a source of inspiration and a most effective vehicle for expressing the faith that glorifies God as the Author of salvation. It is fervently to be hoped that the new edition of our Psalter Hymnal may stimulate appreciation of the Psalms and encourage enthusiastic use of them.

THE forms that Calvin used for Baptism, the Lord's Supper and Marriage have been preserved for us, as well as a number of prayers for private and public use. The forms that Calvin composed for Baptism and Marriage were not, however, followed by those who wrote the forms we now use for these purposes. Very disappointing in the form for marriage is Calvin's failure to teach the positive value of marriage as a creation ordinance, by far the greatest amount of emphasis being placed on the danger of fornication and the function of marriage in preventing it. This no doubt reflects the low state of sexual morals in pre-Reformation times and suggests the struggle that the Reformers had in raising the standards to the New Testament level. Perhaps our increasingly lewd and sensual day calls again for a return to increasingly plain-spoken teaching on this vital subject.

Calvin's voice echoes most loudly when our form for the Lord's Supper is heard. Since this form has been under study for possible revision it is well that we recall how much of it we owe directly to Calvin. Elimination of those expressions would mean the loss of a significant link to our great spiritual forebear.

The form in use in Geneva began, as does ours, by quoting I Corinthians 11:23-29. From this Calvin immediately warns against unworthy partaking by those living in sins. He "excommunicates" those guilty of a list of offenses, a list very similar to that found in our form. Then follows in one sentence the familiar three points of self-examination or proving oneself. "If we have this testimony in our hearts before God, let us have no doubt at all that he adopts us for his children," is an assurance that has been taken over almost verbatim.¹

One of the most beautiful and beloved passages in our form is that which begins: "But this is not designed, dearly beloved brothers and sisters, to deject the contrite hearts of the believers." This, too, echoes Calvin, the same expressions occurring in his form in different order. Even the well-known "but on the contrary" and "nevertheless" are there. Stern as Calvin was in condemning sinners and outspokenly excommunicating them, he could speak

tender words of encouragement to those of little faith and as a true shepherd greatly lead the sheep of Christ's flock.

In two brief paragraphs the positive message, or the faith confessed by partaking of the Sacrament, is expressed. Significantly, the idea of "remembrance," so prominent in our form, is wholly absent. Instead, emphasis is laid on what Christ accomplishes and testifies in the signs and seals. This part of the liturgy reflects Calvin's position as against Luther and Zwingli. The twofold benefit we derive from the Lord's Supper is that Jesus is "our heavenly bread" and "feeds and nourishes us unto life eternal," and that He pledges that the virtue of His death and passion is imputed to us for righteousness, "just as if we had suffered it in our own persons." These ideas, and even the very words in quotation marks, are incorporated into our form in other connections.

Calvin ends with an exhortation: "Let us raise our hearts and minds on high, where Jesus Christ is, in the glory of his Father," and "let us not amuse ourselves with these earthly and corruptible elements . . . as if he were enclosed in bread and wine."

The prayer to be used at the administration of the Lord's Supper is not part of Calvin's form, but is found in connection with the "prayer generally used on the morning of the Lord's Day." Here, too, we find many terms and phrases we use in our Communion prayer. A few examples are: "that we may no longer live in ourselves . . . but he may live in us"; "making us truly partakers of the new and eternal covenant, even the covenant of grace"; "feeling fully persuaded that Thou art pleased to be forever a propitious Father to us, not imputing our offenses, and to furnish us, as dear children and heirs, with all things necessary for the soul as for the body."

SPEAKING of the "prayer for the morning of the Lord's Day" leads me to call attention to one more abiding contribution. The concluding part of that prayer consists of a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, in which the meaning of each petition is briefly stated. It is very instructive to place this paraphrase alongside of the exposition of the model prayer as found in the Heidelberg Catechism. It is easy to see that the authors of the Catechism lean heavily on Calvin and often quote him verbatim. This is a very interesting exhibit of the close interlocking of doctrinal confession and liturgical expression. The principle works both ways: our doctrine will express itself in our liturgical forms and usages on the one hand; and on the other hand, the introduction of foreign, unReformed liturgical elements can easily lead to an opening wedge for doctrinal deviation.

¹. All quotations from Calvin's *Tracts and Treatises*, Vol. II, transl. by H. Beveridge, reprinted by Eerdmans, 1959.

IN conclusion I quote a part of the statement that Calvin appended to his form for Baptism, in which he indicates why he has dropped many Roman Catholic rituals. "First, whatever is not commanded, we are not free to choose. Secondly, nothing which does not tend to edification ought to be received into the Church. If anything of the kind has been introduced, it ought to be taken away, and by so

much stronger reason, whatever serves only to cause scandal, and is as it were, an instrument of idolatry and false opinion, ought on no account to be tolerated." These are words we do well to ponder in these days when growing wealth and culture tempt us to depart from the simplicity and spirituality which are the very essence of the liturgical legacy Calvin has bequeathed to his spiritual children.

Political Antimasonry

by Peter Hoekstra

The mysterious disappearance and probable murder of William Morgan, of Batavia, New York, who had revealed some of the secrets of Freemasonry, set up a chain reaction against the entire Order, when it became clear that Masons shielded each other in crime. Opposition to the Order had already begun before the Morgan affair and in the course of a decade spread to some ten Northern states. The opposition rested on religious and moral grounds but also had a decidedly democratic basis.* In the end it was transformed into one of the most unique political movements in our history.

A charge very frequently made against the Masonic Order was that it was not merely a social institution, but had also entered the political field. It was charged with seeking to place only its own members in elective and appointive offices, and with influencing the decisions of judges and juries.¹ When former Masons began to throw the pitiless light of publicity on the most secret doings of the Lodge, there could no longer be doubt as to the justification of the charge. Moreover, in regard to this charge Masonry may be condemned on the basis

*I discussed this opposition in an article entitled, "The American Revolt Against Freemasonry," published in *The Reformed Journal* for April, 1959.

1. The Revolutions of 1830 in Europe broke out in the midst of the crusade and furnished Antimasons with additional ammunition. The charge was now made that Masonry was *revolutionary*, since it was known that Lafayette and other Masons took part in the revolution in France and other secret groups, such as Young Italy and the Hetairia Philike in Greece, had Masonic leanings. In a previous article (*Reformed Journal*, April, 1959) I have shown that prominent political and military leaders in the American Revolution were Masons. I am convinced that secret societies played a role in most of Europe's revolutions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but convincing proof is lacking. The revolutions against Spain in South America were directed by Masons — Miranda, Bolivar, and San Martin. Some of these men had hobnobbed with their fellow Masons, Pitt in England and Jefferson and Madison in their country, and had received encouragement in their plans.

The international ramifications of Masonry would be a good subject for a doctoral dissertation, provided the facts could be ascertained.

of its oaths, for two of these oaths have obvious political overtones: "I swear to advance my brother's best interests by always supporting his military fame and political preferment in opposition to another." "Furthermore do I promise and swear that I will assist a companion royal arch Mason whenever I shall see him engaged in any difficulty, whether he be right or wrong."

On this ground Masonry was considered to be incompatible with good citizenship. These practices were apt to be a menace to freedom and justice and in various ways touch the lives of men as citizens. It is not surprising, therefore, that Antimasonry, impelled by its own logic, should also enter the political field and should bring its influence to bear at the polls. It is this phase of the movement which has given Antimasonry a unique place in New York where the data are more complete than in most other states.

POLITICAL action began in the spring of 1827. At first this took a negative form — that of withholding the vote from "all such members of the Masonic fraternity as countenanced the outrage against Morgan." Before political action proceeded further, a petition was addressed to the Legislature for the appointment of a special committee to solve all aspects of the Morgan case and to bring the guilty to justice. This petition was turned down by a majority of three to one, and the speaker of the House upon this occasion remarked, "Men are seeking to convert this subject into a political affair and for excluding Masons from public office." Western New York responded by reaffirming its conviction that Masonry was "dangerous to a free government, subversive of political equality, and hostile to the administration of justice." The party then in power in the Legislature was the Democratic or Jacksonian party. It was but natural to infer that this party by its action had shown complicity with the Masons, the more so because its national leader was the high Mason Andrew Jackson, who even in the

midst of the excitement continued to praise the fraternity as "an institution calculated to benefit mankind."

Popular meetings were now held everywhere in the "infected" district, at which resolutions were adopted urging support for true Antimasonic candidates for the Legislature. This was followed, in September and October of 1827, by nominating conventions. The elections of that year astonished even the Antimasons, for they had elected fifteen members to the Legislature. The next year they had seventeen assembly men and four senators. Since 1828 was a year of general elections they also nominated their own candidates for governor and lieutenant-governor, who, however, failed of election. But they now had a respectable, if not formidable, legislative party. During this time the party developed its own leaders among whom Solomon Southwick and John Crary were most prominent. These were men of fine Christian character, but not too well versed in the ways of professional politicians. Up to this point we are dealing with consistent Antimasonry, which refused to affiliate with either of the existing parties and had but a single plank in its platform.

The Antimasonic crusade began in the administration of President Adams, whose party was the National Republican. Adams' popularity was on the decline in New York and chances of his reelection were slim. The Democratic party on the other hand was gaining strength. This situation offered a tempting bait for professional politicians, who now stepped in to guide the movement in a direction different from its original intent. Southwick, Carey, and their followers found it increasingly difficult to maintain their single-minded policy.

Leaders of the Adams' party, among others, were Francis Granger, William H. Seward, and his life-long friend Thurlow Weed. These men had joined the Antimasonic movement partly because they honestly believed that Morgan had been murdered and that the courts had prevented a disclosure of the facts. Weed, who was easily the foremost leader, had not been among the first to advocate the use of the ballot, and his primary interest was not in the moral aspect of the crusade. But he early became convinced that the party platform was too slight and needed a broader base, a firmer political scaffolding. Weed had tasted of power and was desirous of more. He now devised a scheme of using the Antimasonic vote to achieve a larger purpose. He was not unwilling to have Antimasons vote for their purely local candidate, and even encouraged this, but in the national election of 1828 he hoped to get them to vote the National Republican ticket in favor of Adams. In other words, he aimed to form a coalition party. This was a shrewd move, for many remembered Adams' words in answer to an inquirer, "I state that I am not, never was, and never shall be a Freemason." Weed had

reason to hope for a degree of success, for he knew that there was much sympathy in Western New York for some of Adams' policies, such as internal improvements and the tariff. In consequence Adams received a heavy vote from Antimasons.

But to an extent Weed's plan backfired. The Adams party went down in defeat and the Democrats triumphed. Furthermore, some Antimasons would not submit to Weed's political trickery. Against his advice they put up Southwick for governor, condemned Weed for trying to keep a foot in both camps, and denounced him as a traitor to their party. But Weed was not too greatly discouraged, for he had partly succeeded in identifying the National Republican Party with Antimasonry.

The political situation in New York between the two presidential elections is very confused and highly complex and many details will have to be omitted. But the general trend so far as Antimasonry is concerned is fairly clear. When the National Republicans were defeated and soon showed signs of disintegrating, Weed was ready for another maneuver. The Antimasonic group had a weak party organization but its potential voting strength was on the increase. What Weed craved above all was to use this voting strength to accomplish his own purpose, which was that of preventing the arch Mason who occupied the White House from getting a second term. (It is safe to say that he would have opposed Jackson even if he had not been a Mason.) With all the political wiles of which he was capable Weed now proceeded to form another coalition. He was still a member of the central committee and was contributing letters and editorials to some twenty papers. For a while he continued an outward show of opposition to the Lodge, but before long he began to soft-peddle the opposition movement and to discourage anything like a revival of the Antimasonic crusade.

Weed's real purpose became apparent when he began to hint that "the great body of Antimasons would much rather see Clay at the head of public affairs than the Masonic dignity who tramples on the rights of the people," and he now proceeded to rally the party for Clay. But Clay, like Jackson, was a Mason! Weed and his friends now sought to make it appear that Clay was no longer a Mason. He knew better, of course, for he had personally conferred with Clay in 1827, and as he confesses in his *Autobiography* had at that time made some sort of deal with him. Considerable pressure was now brought to bear on Clay to renounce the Order, but Clay was too good a Mason and in the end forbade the use of his name in connection with Antimasonry.

Weed now saw no inconsistency in trying to carry water on both shoulders by appealing to Masons as well as Antimasons. He openly made deals with Masons for their vote. If anti-Jacksonian Masons

wished to join the Antimasonic party, they were to be welcomed. And why should they not be, for the new party formation which Weed was engaged in building was no longer to be distinguished from any other party in opposition to Jackson. Antimasonry under Weed's leadership had become anti-Jacksonism. The name no longer fitted the party's purpose. Antimasonry was all but forgotten. The party had become a hybrid, a Siamese twin.

All this was not accomplished without much bickering within the party. Southwick and others protested again and again, with justice, that the party was losing its integrity and had deviated from its fundamental principle. The question may be asked, Why did so many of the apparently sincere followers of Southwick and Carey desert their original leaders and fall in with the plans of Weed? One answer is that the very obvious success which the crusade had achieved led many to believe that the original purpose had been accomplished. Then, too, former Masons, about whose true conversion there may be some doubt, were more politically minded than socially and religiously minded and were in sympathy with Weed's larger party purpose.

WEED was one of the ablest editors of his day and his paper was widely read outside of his state. He thus early had a hand in stimulating and encouraging an initial Antimasonic crusade in New England and the middle states. But from this it should not be inferred that he was in any sense the father of Antimasonry outside of New York, for in the main the causes that were operative in his state were also operative elsewhere. But when the first impulse had spent itself, Antimasonry everywhere began to look to New York for its methods and its policies and tended to become a political movement. With local variations, the general trend was for the Antimasonic party so-called to supplant National Republicans and to take over their policies, such as support of internal improvements and protective tariffs, while at the same time catering to the vote of true Antimasons. Sometimes this was effectively accomplished by endorsing a resolution of a true Antimasonic convention or by finding room for an Antimasonic plank in the party's platform. The following may be considered typical: "Resolved, that we cordially respond to the resolutions adopted by the late Antimasonic convention in Pennsylvania, that Masonry is necessarily political, that without attacking Masonry at the ballot box, where it is entrenched behind political patronage and the favor of the government, all efforts to destroy its usurpations of the rights and privileges of the people must fail" (Massachusetts, 1831).

In regard to other states as well as to New York a distinction should be made between honest, consistent Antimasonry and political Antimasonry.

In New York the only true Antimasonic party was that of Southwick and Carey of 1827 and 1828. In other states, notably in Ohio and the New England states, true Antimasonry lasted longer than in New York. In Pennsylvania, in particular, Thaddeus Stevens tirelessly kept the issue before the people; there were repeated rallies in favor of the original crusade, and frequent reassessments of the true party's fundamental principle. As the following resolution, adopted at a county convention as late as 1834, indicates, there were whole groups in that state which stubbornly refused to affiliate with any other party but their own: "Resolved, that we consider the question of the bank as a matter of trifling importance, compared with the great principles for which we are contending, and that we will continue to wage an unintermittent war against Masonry and Masonic usurpations in defense of our dearest rights, let the bank sink or swim."

BY 1831 the party was ready to nominate a candidate for the presidency, which was done at a convention in Baltimore. This convention was attended by delegates from New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, Rhode Island, Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, and Ohio. Even Michigan territory was represented. Weed was still in favor of Clay, but the convention nominated William Wirt as its standard bearer. The inconsistency of the party name was again made apparent, for Wirt was a Mason and at the very convention which nominated him had made a speech in favor of Masonry. Wirt received only the seven votes of Vermont in the electoral college of 1832. Once again Antimasonry had failed to achieve its aim.

Party leaders now felt that the time had come for a change of name. Between 1832 and 1834 the old party name gradually disappeared in New York and the name Whig was substituted. Practically everywhere the remnants of the Antimasonic party joined the ranks of the Whigs, and opposition to Masonry was no longer the tie that held its members together. But here and there the old name survived for many years. The last effort of the old party to participate in national affairs came in 1837 with the nomination of William H. Harrison for president. Thaddeus Stevens had previously addressed several pointed questions to Harrison, one of which indicates that he at least had not forsaken the original purpose of Antimasonry. He asked, "Will you join your Antimasonic fellow-citizens in the use of all constitutional, fair and honorable means for their final and effectual suppression?" Harrison replied in effect that, while he believed in Antimasonry, he doubted whether the Federal government or any of its departments had the constitutional power to suppress Masonry. This view was not shared by Stevens and he now withdrew

his support from Garrison. The convention which nominated Garrison in 1837 was attended by fifty delegates from only four states. Political Antimasonry had now run its course.²

The movement as a whole, whether considered as Antimasonry pure and simple or as political

2. In the course of its history the party placed several of its members in Congress, but these never functioned as a party. The printed Congressional debates do not refer to Antimasonry.

Antimasonry, made one permanent contribution to our political practices. The approved method of nominating presidents at the time was by Congressional caucus, but since the Antimasonic party at first had no representatives in Congress they resorted to popular conventions to elect all their candidates — local, county, state, and national. Other parties saw the advantage and soon fell in line. This has ever since become the method used by both parties in nominating presidential candidates.

Peter Ekster

by J. G. Vanden Bosch

PERMIT me, dear reader, to make you acquainted with a once prominent divine and to ask you to consider with me the significance of his life. As to his personal appearance we note that he was a man tall of stature and firm of build. His open countenance bespoke a frank spirit that invited trust and his large brown eyes beamed kindness and sympathy. His entire mien gave the impression of his being a man of firm and solid character and an affable personality. His mild voice was rich in manly sentiment that easily holds the attention of an audience. Already more than forty years ago, this voice, to which hundreds of worshippers had listened with rapt attention for their spiritual nourishment, was silenced by death. This man was one of the earliest students to enroll in the newly organized Theological School in 1876.

Though foreign born, Peter Ekster — this was his name — was home trained. He was born in Baflo, a village in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands, a village having the distinction of being the birthplace of Rudolph Agricola, a famous Dutch scholar of the thirteenth century, and not far from Ulrum where the Secession of 1834 broke out under Rev. Hendrik De Cock. His parents were humble folk and sometimes were so poor that all they could give their children for their evening repast was a dish of boiled carrots. Hearing of America as a land of plenty, the parents decided to exchange their native land for the new world. Their voyage across the ocean left the memory of bitter experience; one of their sons died en route, and his remains were committed to the waves. In 1867, they arrived at Kalamazoo, where the family settled permanently. Being only eleven years old upon his arrival, Peter grew up in this city during the most impressionable period of his life, attending school, playing with the children of the neighborhood, and, when he was old enough, working in a factory in

which trunks were made. Socially and religiously he may have retained traits of his Dutch inheritance owing to the policy of isolation more or less unwittingly practiced; in many other respects he became an American sharing with his fellow citizens the American outlook and point of view.

NOT having lost their faith in their passage across the Atlantic, the parents, looking for men and women of their own faith, joined the First Church of Kalamazoo. Their son Peter was without a doubt much indebted, spiritually, to the influence of its first two pastors, Rev. J. Noordewier and Rev. E. Vander Vries. Already as a young man he was interested in Kingdom truth and evinced great eagerness to learn. The address which Rev. G. E. Boer one week-day evening delivered in Kalamazoo on Romans 8:1 strongly affected him, as he testified in his inaugural sermon at Spring Lake. Not only did he in due time confess Christ as his Savior and Lord, but, unable to suppress a strong desire to preach the gospel of saving grace to others, he made known the longing of his heart to the proper officials, met with encouragement, and was accepted. Thus in the fall of 1878, only two years and a half after its founding, he was enrolled as a student in the Theological School at Grand Rapids. If he was aware of good educational facilities in his own city, at his very door almost, he did not avail himself of these advantages. At least two considerations might have occurred to him for making use of them: the acquiring of sufficient fluency in the English language to use it in the preaching of the gospel and less expense, but he was so loyal to his group that these considerations very likely never presented themselves to his mind. Isolation was too strong a force in the life of our people to allow any thinking of this sort.

Peter Ekster regularly met his teacher in a two-

story brick building on Williams Street, near the depot, on the first floor of which the Christian school conducted under the auspices of the Spring Street Church was housed. The congregation leased the second story to the Theological School for the magnificent sum of fifty dollars a year. In Ekster's day there were never more than a dozen students, taught in nearly all subjects, both literary and theological, by the newly elected docent, Rev. G. E. Boer. Later, as more men were added to the teaching staff, some of the rooms had to be vacated by noon to accommodate the janitor's family. The bond that united master and disciples, and the disciples each to each, was a very intimate one and was made firm by a common aim.

Most students were older than Peter Ekster. In a photograph of the student body still extant this difference in age is plainly shown. Of those who finished their course in 1883, the same year when Ekster finished his, one had been a farmer and was fifteen years older, another had been a teacher in a Christian school and was thirteen years his senior. Only Geerhardus Vos was younger and was a graduate of a gymnasium in Amsterdam. This situation could not but leave an impression upon Peter Ekster. It no doubt fostered a serious view of life and work. Difficult as it may have been to make the transition from farm or factory to school, from physical activity to sedentary intellectual effort, the students of those days saved themselves from despair and discouragement by their devotion to an undeviating purpose and to the hard work necessary to achieve that purpose. The only side show, to use the language of Woodrow Wilson, was the insistent demand that students fill vacant pulpits on Sunday or perform other work in the congregation. Without realizing the value of self-activity as a pedagogical principle, students mastered the art of independent study.

SO, then, after five years of study Peter Ekster was declared a candidate for the sacred ministry together with E. Broene and R. Drukker, Geerhardus Vos having decided to continue his studies at Princeton. He received two calls: one from the Board of Home Missions and one from the church at Spring Lake. Convinced that he had no fitness for the work of a missionary, he felt constrained to accept Spring Lake especially since the call of this church was a unanimous one and very urgent. He married Miss Nellie De Jong and was ordained and installed by Professor G. E. Boer. What a change there had come to him. Only five years ago he was a factory worker, now he was an ordained servant of his Lord. Since he was the first pastor of this flock of fifty families and this flock was his first charge, he experienced the feelings and intimate relationship usually engendered by

such a situation. He remained in Spring Lake three years.

In the month of September of the year 1886 Rev. Ekster was installed pastor of the Alpine Avenue church on the west side of Grand Rapids. This was a large and growing flock which needed a strong and tactful man to shepherd it. It was a young church and composed as it was of several heterogeneous elements such as Frisians and Zealanders and still others, it required tact of a high order to weld them into a smoothly functioning body. To succeed the veteran Rev. W. H. Frieling under whose care the flock had grown from fifty to a hundred fifty families was no sinecure. Moreover, there was the preparation and delivery of three sermons every Sunday, the conducting of funerals, the performance of marriages, the teaching of catechism classes, the visiting of the sick, the work with delinquents, the handling of cases of discipline, the counseling of people in trouble at any hour of the day or night and something of the constant strain implied in St. Paul's phrase, "the care of the churches"; one wonders how one man, even if the willing help of an efficient consistory was his, could attend to all these duties; one wonders how he could ever find time for reading a good book or periodical, or for serious study, or for a pleasant hour in the family circle. There was also trial. The strenuous propaganda made by the Baptists among the Hollanders of the westside succeeded in drawing some families away from the church. But there were events that brought cheer as well. The charter members of Crosby Street church came chiefly from crowded Alpine Avenue as also did several of the founders of Broadway. Yet Alpine Avenue was still a populous congregation, and its material prosperity culminated in the erection, essentially, of its present imposing edifice. The fact that Rev. Ekster shepherded this flock of some three hundred families for nineteen years marks him as a man of no mean ability.

BEGINNING to feel the effect of his strenuous labors, Rev. Ekster in 1905 accepted a call from the church at Midland Park, New Jersey. This congregation numbering one hundred thirty-five families, though large enough to keep him occupied, would not over-tax his strength. In so far as the physical environment affects human life the scene out East, so different from that in the Mid-West and so picturesque, made the transition less difficult. It tended to lessen the remembrance of past scenes and happenings and to foster contentment with the new. The people, too, though of the same faith and nationality, yet had their own characteristics such as would ingratiate them in the favor of their pastor. The three years spent here were pleasant ones.

The serenity of this pastorate was disturbed by a

second call from the First Church of Grand Rapids, once a flourishing congregation of some three hundred families, but by 1908, owing to unfavorable location near the heart of the city, reduced to a mere hundred twenty. The church was confronted with three seemingly unsurmountable problems: change of location, the transition from one language to another, and the acquisition of new members. The force of this call he could not resist, and he accepted. Again his labors were blessed. The old location and buildings with all their hallowed associations were abandoned, and a new edifice and manse were erected on a new site, all in a peaceful spirit. The number of members mounted and the spacious auditorium began to accommodate large audiences. Meanwhile the problem of introducing English asserted itself persistently and proved difficult of settlement. One arrangement after another was tried without satisfactory results. Rev. Ekster, however, was not permitted to complete the settlement of this vexing issue, for the Lord took him and he was not. A heart attack cut short his life in his sixty-third year. His ministrations were ended, but it must be owned that in the providence of God who blessed his wise leadership First Church survived and was given a new lease of life.

The family circle of Rev. Ekster numbered five daughters. Two of them by marrying exchanged one manse for another, one as the wife of Rev. Herman Tuls, the other as the wife of Rev. P. W. De Jonge. A third, now deceased, was married to Christian Rickers; the other two after their marriage are known as Mrs. William Zaagman and Mrs. Henry Vander Werp.

IN appraising the life and work of Rev. Ekster one cannot help observing the excellent gifts with which God had endowed him, gifts not only "adorn[ing] the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things," but equipping him for an honorable career as a minister of the gospel. All who knew Rev. Ekster respected him highly for his godliness. They soon discovered his piety to be something genuine, not something easily donned or doffed at will. In him it was a Christian virtue that constantly manifested itself. It was not of the long faced variety, for at times his perception of the incongruous caused him to break out into hearty laughter. His was a wholesome piety that had its roots in living in intimate fellowship with his Lord.

Humility, a mark of true godliness, was also an outstanding trait of the man. Averse to parading his own powers and achievements, he underrated rather than overrated them. It was not in him to push himself forward and to seek positions of honor and influence. Having but a small opinion of himself, he leaned the more heavily upon his God so that he was a man of much prayer. Always he began the day's work in his study on bended knee, invok-

ing the help of his heavenly Father. One of the secrets of his efficiency as a minister was prayer.

We note further that Rev. Ekster was a conscientious man. He was in the habit of writing out his entire sermons to satisfy his own high ideals in preaching and to forearm himself against the fault-finding of critics. His written sermons reveal a careful author who observed the requirements of good composition and whose pages were singularly free from corrections and blots. Conscientious he was in all his appointments.

The wisdom and the courage he displayed, next deserve notice. These traits were beautifully illustrated in his attitude toward the Americanizing movement that began to enlist the attention of classes and synods. He stood for cooperation rather than for opposition. Were it not for his sympathetic support and guidance, LaGrave could not have been organized when it was. Most fitting it was Rev. Ekster who installed Rev. J. G. De Baun, its first pastor. In the organization of Broadway church he again evinced his wisdom in giving the petitioners helpful guidance.

Though Rev. Ekster served the Kingdom of God in various capacities, such as curator of the Theological School, member of the Board of Missions, member of the Board of the Psychopathic Hospital at Cutlerville, and perhaps still others, he was par excellence a minister of the gospel. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16); this was the text chosen for the inaugural delivered at the time of his ordination and to the truth expressed in it he was true all his life. The gospel of Christ was the theme and inspiration of all his preaching. Not with coldness and sheer objectivity, but with warmth and with feeling for the spiritual needs of his people he proclaimed this gospel. The sinner nothing, Christ everything, this was ever the heart of his messages, and for this reason "the common people heard him gladly."

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Book Review

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD. By Emil Brunner. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950. \$6.00.

Reviewed by EDWIN WALHOUT, teacher of Bible, Eastern Christian High, New Jersey.

One way of coming to an understanding of Emil Brunner's doctrine of God is to examine his repudiation of the traditional doctrine of the attributes of God. This traditional doctrine, he says, has not been formulated according to the Biblical idea of God but according to the pagan Greek idea of God. "It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the theological doctrine of the Divine Attributes, handed on from the theology of the Early Church, has been shaped by the Platonic and Neo-Platonic Idea of God, and not by the Biblical Idea" (p. 243). The result, Brunner says, is a "fantastic distortion" of the true doctrine.

More specifically, Brunner says that it was a result of this pagan rational theology that the doctrine of the Attributes was considered to be a description of the nature of God in Himself, apart from His relation to His creatures. Brunner maintains, on the contrary, that "God in His Nature is inaccessible" (p. 162), for God "cannot be grasped by means of any rational categories" (p. 282). The attributes of God, therefore, refer not to what God is in Himself but to what He is in relation to His creation. "In Himself, however, God is not the Almighty, the Omniscient, the Righteous One; this is what He is in relation to the world which He has created The ideas of divine attributes . . . all point back to God's Nature, but they express this Nature of God in relation to different particular aspects of the created world" (p. 247).

For example, the traditional formulation of the attribute of Omnipotence, namely, that "God can do everything," is rejected by Brunner as having "been determined by the ontology of Neo-Platonism: God as Being" (p. 248). The connection is this: if one accepts "the speculative ontological starting-point, *God-Being*," then the only conclusion possible is that the attribute of omnipotence refers to Being in itself and not to God's relationship to the creation, which is "impossible for a genuinely Biblical system of thought" (p. 249). On the contrary, "the Bib-

lical teaching about Divine Omnipotence is concerned with the relation of God to that which He has created" (p. 250). Omnipotence therefore means, not the abstract idea that God can do everything, but that He is "Absolute Lord over His own creation" (p. 250). He has created "the ALL, over which He, because He is its Creator, has complete authority" (p. 250). "Thus from the very outset the Biblical idea of God as Almighty . . . can only be understood in its correlation with this divine self-limitation which lies in the nature of His Creation" (p. 251).

One more example will suffice: the attribute of Eternity. Here, too, Brunner suggests, "the speculations of Platonism and Neo-Platonism" have "slipped into Christian theology," producing a doctrine "which understands eternity as timelessness" (p. 266). However, "within the sphere of the Christian revelation the idea of Eternity is entirely different" (p. 267). God is not untouched and unmoved by the events in time, as implied by the notion that God is timeless, outside of time, unrelated to time. On the contrary, "God takes part in temporal happenings, indeed He even involves Himself in the temporal; He reveals Himself in historical time; He becomes Man" (p. 268). "His Eternity, then, is something quite different from timelessness: it is a sovereign rule over Time and the temporal sphere" (p. 270).

It is my opinion that Brunner's doctrine of God cannot be properly understood except in the context of the philosophical background of modern times; namely, that climaxed by Immanuel Kant. Since Kant's "Copernican revolution" in philosophic thought it has become increasingly popular to chide traditional theology for having been unduly influenced by Greek philosophy rather than by Biblical revelation. Nearly every modern writer of the neo-orthodox school has something uncomplimentary to say of the Platonic determination of classic Christian theology.

As indicated above, I believe that this contemporary rejection of the Greek

elements in Christian theology is being done only within the tacit assumptions of Kantian philosophy. If orthodox theology has been influenced by pagan Greek philosophy, surely contemporary theology is being formulated within the framework of modern existentialist philosophy. Neo-orthodox theologians maintain that the modern perspective is more compatible with Scripture than the older orthodox perspective. But it is precisely this thesis which needs examination and demonstration. It is not immediately obvious that the modern philosophical bias is more consistently Biblical than that of orthodox theology.

I should like now to demonstrate that the modern neo-orthodox doctrine of God, as developed by Brunner, is indeed determined by the philosophical categories definitively introduced by Kant. The rightness or wrongness of

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these concepts is not under discussion here, but only the determinative influence of those concepts on his theology.

One of Kant's most important emphases, if not the most important, is that of the distinction between phenomena and noumena, between things-as-they-appear and things-in-themselves. The human mind is incapable of determining whether or not its knowledge actually corresponds to its object. Knowledge is of things as they appear to the senses, not of things as they really are in themselves. Thus while snow appears to be white to our senses, there is no way of determining whether this is actually so. The whiteness of which we are aware in our minds cannot be demonstrated to correspond with any quality of the external object called snow. Thus the reference of human knowledge is subjective as opposed to objective.

Kant universalizes this point, and maintains that all human knowledge is entirely subjective. Qualities which are naively assumed to exist in external objects, in reality exist in the knowing subject only. Human reason can make no predication whatever concerning any external object other than that it exists. The noumenal object which we name snow cannot properly be said to be white in itself, it only appears to be so. It is phenomenally white but noumenally without quality.

When these phenomenalist categories are applied to God, it is obvious that if God exists He does so exclusively as a noumenal being, for our senses bring us no direct contact with Him. We cannot see Him, hear Him, touch Him or taste Him. In phenomenalist terms, therefore, God in Himself cannot be known. The ordinary categories of rational thought, because they refer exclusively to phenomena, cannot be used to describe God.

It is at this point that the connection between Kant and Brunner becomes ob-

vious. Brunner says, "By his own knowledge, all that man can grasp is the world. God, however, is *not* the world; therefore He stands outside the circle in which human knowledge and human doctrine — acquired by man's own efforts — can move, and with which they are competent to deal" (p. 14). This statement is intelligible only as being synonymous with Kant's limitation of human knowledge to the phenomenal world. It is to be noted that Brunner uses the term "world" as synonymous with Kant's term "phenomena."

It becomes clear, therefore, why Brunner insists that the attributes of God do not speak of qualities which characterize God's Being but speak rather of His relationships. Rational concepts are limited to the phenomenal world and cannot refer to things in themselves. Whenever humans speak of God, therefore, they must do so only in so far as God has broken into the realm of phenomena.

This is the meaning of revelation in Brunner's thought: revelation is God breaking through the great gulf separating noumena from phenomena. In revelation God "comes to us from a region beyond all spheres known to us," and "breaks through the barriers of our own experience of the world and the Self, and enters into our world as one who does not belong to it" (p. 118).

Brunner continually distinguishes between the God of thought and the God of revelation, between the God of philosophical Theism and the God of Biblical revelation. This distinction too must be understood in the philosophical framework of modern times. If a theologian insists that the attributes of God, for example, do in reality correspond to qualities of God in Himself, what he is actually doing is dragging God out of the noumenal realm into the phenomenal realm, and setting up this rationally constructed God as an intellectual idol. Such a procedure "is an idolatrous materialization of God, however 'spiritualized' and abstract it may be" (p. 192). "The God of thought must differ from the God of revelation. The God who is 'conceived' by thought is not the one who discloses Himself; from this point of view He is an intellectual idol" (p. 136).

In this light we may understand Brunner's rejection of the doctrine that God is the "first cause" of the existence of the world, as the orthodox doc-



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trine of creation has traditionally formulated it. "The Biblical idea of the Creator . . . is quite different from the philosophical idea of the Maker of the world, the *prima causa*" (p. 142). The reasoning behind this statement clearly is based upon phenomenalist assumptions. Thus: the concept of cause is one derived from our experience of the phenomenal world. Being a phenomenalist term, therefore, it is evidently illegitimate to apply it to a noumenal being such as God. To do so, as orthodox theology does, can only be to create an idea of God on the basis of our experience, and such a God is quite different from the noumenal God who comes to us in the Biblical revelation. The construction of an idea of God from the terms of human experience can result only in a God who is created by man and projected into objectivity, and who thus becomes a philosophical idol. Causation, being a relationship within the phenomenal realm, cannot therefore be the proper understanding of the doctrine of Creation. "The statement: God is the Creator, is therefore not a theoretical statement about the way in which the world came into existence" (p. 142).

From all the above, therefore, we may understand the "absolute gulf" which separates Creator from creature. Brunner is concerned not merely to safeguard the idea of the distinction between Creator and creature. As has been shown, creation does not involve causal origins; nor does belief in God imply belief in Him as a metaphysical Being, simply because nothing can be known of such a Being. It seems to me that Brunner's "absolute gulf" between Creator and creature is identical with Kant's "absolute gulf" between noumena and phenomena. Just as there is no intelligible connection between noumena and phenomena, so too there is no intelligible connection — from the creaturely standpoint — between God and man. God is the "wholly other."

At this point another parallel may be drawn — one which, however, may be

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somewhat forced. For Kant, objects-in-themselves continually obtrude themselves upon the human senses. It is the very nature of these noumenal objects to produce sensations — or percepts — via the sensory nerves. Similarly, for Brunner, God exists as a noumenal being whose nature it is to break continually into the phenomenal realm of our experience. "In His revelation the otherwise hidden being of God is expressed Thus the position is not that first of all God is 'something,' and then, later on, reveals what He is; rather, we may say that it is God's very nature to want to reveal Himself Revelation is not something which is added to His Nature, it is part of His very Nature" (p. 165). "In the witness of the Bible it is not so much that God merely reveals that He is Present; rather the revelation itself is one of the ways in which He is present, and indeed it is the most important and decisive one" (p. 256).

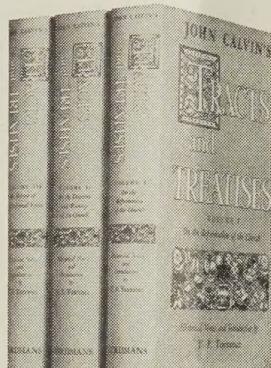
One more concluding parallel I would like to suggest; and it is really more of a question in my mind than a conclusive observation. Brunner writes, "God's Presence in His creatures is more than His mere existence; it is the abiding basis of their being, their life God's Presence, in whatever form, is always the principle of the possibility of existence" (p. 261). Since the existence of creatures is not causally related to that of God, can it be that the relationship is identical with Kant's phenomena-noumena relationship? The connection being this: phenomena cannot exist except on the presupposition of the existence of noumena. Thus nou-

menal objects may be regarded as the ground of phenomenal objects, and in a manner of speaking, as their creator. My question is: According to Brunner, is not the existence of God the ground of the existence of the world in the same way that, according to Kant, objects-in-themselves are the ground of the existence of objects-as-they-appear?

Some of these parallels may appear to be somewhat tenuous. This may be partially explained by the considerable lapse of time between Kant and Brun-

ner. In order to make the comparisons more conclusive it would be necessary first to show the rootage of modern existentialism in phenomenism and then to demonstrate the determinative effect of that contemporary philosophy upon Brunner's thinking. A good deal of water has passed over the theological dam since 1800. Nevertheless, I do express these thoughts in a responsible and serious way to those who are interested, recognizing that much more remains to be done.

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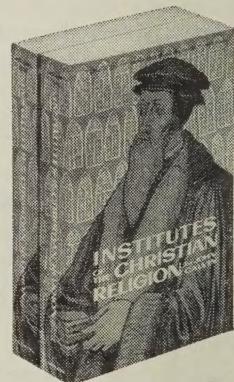
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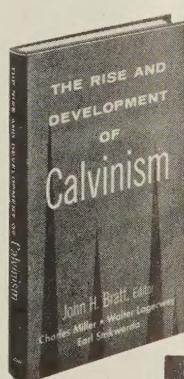
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